



Middlesex, by Jeffrey Eugenides

About the Book...

"I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974." And so begins *Middlesex*, the mesmerizing saga of a near-mythic Greek American family and the "roller-coaster ride of a single gene through time." The odd but utterly believable story of Cal Stephanides, and how this 41-year-old hermaphrodite was raised as Calliope, is at the tender heart of this long-awaited second novel from Jeffrey Eugenides.



About the Author...

Jeffrey Eugenides was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1960. He graduated magna cum laude from Brown University, and received an M.A. in English and Creative Writing from Stanford University in 1986. His first novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, was published to acclaim in 1993. It has been translated into fifteen languages and made into a feature film. His fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *The Yale Review*, *Best American Short Stories*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *Granta's* "Best of Young American Novelists." In 2003, Jeffrey Eugenides received The Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Middlesex* (2002).

Eugenides is the recipient of many awards, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, a Whiting Writers' Award, and the Henry D. Vursell Memorial Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In the past few years he has been a Fellow of the Berliner Künstlerprogramm of the DAAD and of the American Academy in Berlin.

After spending some time in Berlin, Eugenides now lives in Chicago with his wife and daughter where he is on the faculty of Princeton University's Program in Creative Writing. In January 2008 he published an anthology, *My Mistress's Sparrow Is Dead: Great Love Stories from Chekhov to Munro*, the proceeds of which will go directly to fund the free youth writing programs offered by 826 Chicago which is part of the network of seven writing centers across the United States affiliated with 826 National, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students ages 6 to 18 with their creative and expository writing skills, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways is *Middlesex* like stories in Greek mythology? Do you think it is a modern day myth?
2. *Middlesex* is divided into four books, and Cal is not even born until Book III. Why do you think he felt the need to tell so much of his grandparents' and parents' stories in order to tell about his own life?
3. *Middlesex* covers a lot of contemporary history, starting in 1922. Are there some historic events that you learned more about from the book? The burning of Smyrna? The founding of the Nation of Islam? The Detroit race riots?
4. Were you surprised by Lefty and Desdemona's courtship and marriage? Could you understand why they fell in love? Do you think their marriage was morally wrong?
5. In what ways is Callie's life as a hermaphrodite similar to her family's lives as immigrants--not quite one thing or the other?
6. Why do you think Tessie was drawn to Milton?
7. Were you surprised by Father Mike's extortion and plan to abandon his family? Were their hints about his character earlier in the novel?
8. In what ways was Callie's relationship with the Obscure Object unique and in what ways was it like normal adolescent sexual exploration?
9. Why did Callie feel the need to run away after reading Dr. Luce's report? Do you think her parents could have accepted her decision not to have the surgery? Could Callie have changed her identity if she did not go out on her own?
10. What is your opinion of Dr. Luce?
11. Do you think Cal's relationship with Julie worked out? Did he, in his adult narrator self, change during the novel?